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Employment Research

SPRING 1996

School-to-Work Programs
to Facilitate Youth
Employment and Learning



Performance Standards
and Welfare Reform



Conference on the Changes
in Working Time in Canada
and the U.S.



New Books

Vol. 3, No. 1

Employment Research is a publication of the W. E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research, a nonprofit research organization devoted to finding and promoting solutions to employment-related problems at the national, state, and local level. The Institute is an activity of the W. E. Upjohn Unemployment Trustee Corporation, which was established in 1932 to administer a fund set aside by the late Dr. W. E. Upjohn, founder of the Upjohn Company, to conduct research on the causes and effects of unemployment and seek measures for the alleviation of unemployment.

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Randall W. Eberts
Executive Director

Kevin Hollenbeck

School-to-Work Programs to Facilitate Youth Employment and Learning

Traditional vocational education, stereotypically thought of as "shop classes," has undergone a radical transformation. Technical education classes of today emphasize the integration of academic and vocational skills. School districts collaborate closely with employers to ensure that the skills and knowledge that are taught align with today's workplaces. Tech-prep programs articulate coursework from high school through two-year postsecondary degrees. The term "vocational education" has been replaced by the terms school-to-work or school-to-career programs. The federal government gave this transformation a boost with the passage of the 1994 School-to-Work Opportunities Act (STWOA).

The school-to-work initiatives that the federal government and states are launching lie at the intersection of two major problems facing the United States. The first problem is an awkward system for youth to make the transition from formal schooling into careers. Despite keen international competition, the United States is not making productive use of the millions of young people between 18 and 28 who have marginal attachment to the labor force and who

exhibit excessive rates of turnover and unemployment. This problem is intensified for young people who may be identified as at-risk.

The second problem that school-to-work initiatives are targeted on is the need for systemic reform of public education. Since the publication of the report, *A Nation at Risk*, the United States has been grappling with the issue of educational

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reform. Proponents of school-to-work initiatives suggest that work-based programs may facilitate learning for students whose learning styles

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From the Executive Director

Two years ago we instituted this semi-annual newsletter, containing brief descriptions of current research, as a way of disseminating information about our projects on a more timely basis. Soon we will be taking the next step in providing up-to-the-minute information about Institute activities. We are in the process of constructing an internet world wide web site, which we expect to be in operation by mid-summer. We anticipate that the web site will be a convenient way for you to receive the most current information about new book releases, grant and dissertation award deadlines and submission procedures, and current staff research projects. You will also be able to download the full text of *Employment Research* and the Institute's latest working papers, as well as summaries of *Business Outlook* for the West Michigan economy.

In the interim, I would like to describe a few projects that our staff members are currently conducting or have recently completed. **Kevin Hollenbeck** and **Jean Kimmel** just submitted the final report of a process and net impact evaluation of Ohio's JOBS Student Retention Program (JSRP). This program is intended to facilitate the retention of JOBS clients in two-year community and technical colleges. JSRP, developed and implemented before the current rush to reform welfare, anticipated the critical importance of education to improve welfare recipients' earnings potential. The evaluation suggests that JSRP is successful. Participants were able to make the transition into college programs, achieve good grades, and earn more than individuals in a constructed comparison group.

Under contract with the Workers' Compensation Board (WCB) of British Columbia, Canada, **Allan Hunt** directed a team that gathered extensive information about how the British

Columbia workers' compensation system operates. This study was the third of three studies conducted by Dr. Hunt in the last five years, and the report documents the changes that have taken place in the British Columbia system during that time. Dr. Hunt is currently negotiating with the Victoria WorkCover Authority for a similar study in Australia.

Steve Woodbury is currently working on a U.S. Department of Labor project to estimate the effects of experience rating on employers' behavior, and more specifically, on how incomplete experience rating may affect unemployment. **Tim Bartik** is conducting research and writing a book on the effectiveness of labor demand policies in creating jobs for the poor.

George Erickcek and **Susan Houseman** have recently received a grant from the U.S. Department of Labor to conduct an employer survey on the use of various flexible staffing arrangements: workers from temporary employment agencies, short-term hires, part-time workers, and independent contractors. While anecdotal evidence abounds, data collected in the survey will provide a more systematic assessment of basic characteristics and trends in this segment of the nation's labor market.

Randall Eberts and **Christopher O'Leary** are currently evaluating Michigan's Worker Profiling and Reemployment Services System. In 1994, the federal government mandated that all states identify UI recipients according to their likelihood of exhausting benefits and refer these recipients as quickly as possible into reemployment services. Several demonstration projects showed that early intervention was successful in speeding up the reemployment of displaced workers.

Those of you who are interested in learning more about these projects are encouraged to contact the staff person directly. And please add the Upjohn Institute to your web-site directory this summer.

Randall W. Eberts



Conference on the Changes in Working Time in Canada and the U.S.

This major international conference is presented by the Canadian Employment Research Forum (CERF) in cooperation with the W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research, Statistics Canada, and Human Resources Development Canada.

The structure of work has changed dramatically within the last decade, often within the context of nonstandard and part-time work. This conference will provide a forum for the presentation and discussion of new research in the area of working time.

The June 13 - 15 conference in Ottawa, Canada will be of interest to economists, policy analysts, human resource specialists, and labor analysts from corporations, unions, governments, universities, and social agencies.

More than 30 papers will be presented on the following topics:

- Changing Hours of Work
- Private and Public Sector Case Studies
- Lifecycle Perspective
- Women and the Distribution of Work
- Nonstandard Employment
- Part-Time and Overtime Work
- Worksharing or Short Time Compensation
- Policy Dimensions

Those who register by May 23 will receive a discount on conference fees.

For further information about the program and for registration material, contact:

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W.E. Upjohn Institute
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School-to-Work Programs

(Continued from page 1)

accommodate practical, "hands on" approaches. Research is beginning to suggest that at-risk youth may benefit most from work-based learning strategies.

The purpose of this article is to describe briefly the nature of school-to-work programs, to indicate the status of these programs across the country, and to identify some barriers or constraints that they face and how policy makers might respond to these barriers.

School-to-Work Program Models

The school-to-work programs that have been established in different settings and contexts across the country do not follow any one model. Programs differ in terms of credentials offered, extent to which postsecondary institutions are involved, extent to which learning takes place at a worksite, whether or not work-based learning situations are paid, age of student, target populations, target occupations, and other characteristics. The following four elements represent criteria that might be used to classify a program as a school-to-work transition program:

- it constitutes an identifiable, formal part of a secondary and/or postsecondary curriculum with an explicit objective of facilitating the transition from formal schooling to work
- it involves active participation of employers
- it involves actual or simulated on-the-job experience
- it results in formal or informal certification of skills

The major types of programs that meet these criteria include school-to-(registered) apprenticeships, youth or pre-apprenticeships, tech-prep education, career academies, cooperative education, school-based enterprises, business-education compacts, employer certified programs, worksite learning, and career

exposure programs. (See Stern (1994) and Hollenbeck and Timmeney (1996) for summary descriptions of these program types.)

Status of School-to-Work Programs

School-to-work programs are beginning to take root at the national level. Several localities have implemented programs that demonstrate their potential effectiveness. A recent publication from Jobs for the Future (Kopp and Kazis 1995) provides an excellent review of ten innovative programs from across the country. Furthermore, an infrastructure of personnel, curricula, legislation, student outreach materials, and employer marketing techniques has developed. National staff development conferences are being held, and information is being exchanged on the Internet (see VOCNET, for example). Building on the successful

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demonstrations, most school districts are now developing or enhancing their school-to-work programs. In short, the current status of school-to-work programs is that they are "moving up to scale."

The strategy that the federal government is following through the STWOA is to provide substantial, five-year grants for states to foster the movement up to scale, but to allow the states to develop their own initiatives that suit their unique resources and needs. The states are competing for federal support and, to date, 27 states have been funded. The grants provide relatively small amounts of funding during the first and last years of the five-year period and relatively larger amounts in the middle

years. This funding flow allows states to plan and design programs during the early phase of the grant. The substantial funding during the middle years of the state's grant is to be used to grow programs at the local level. After the five-year period, the States and local districts will sustain the operating programs and federal support will disappear.

In a recent report (Hollenbeck 1996b), I documented the success that school-to-work programs are having with students. Through focus groups with students, I learned that school-to-work programs stimulate student interest in particular occupations (or occupational clusters), but they also bestow other career-related benefits. Students made useful employer contacts. They learned skills that will be useful in future education and career plans, even though they might not enter the specific occupations of the programs in which they were enrolled. Perhaps the most surprising lesson was the importance that the students placed on postsecondary attendance. The school-to-work programs encouraged some students to plan for postsecondary training who had not originally been headed in that direction. The programs provided students with information that helped them to select specific institutions and to narrow their fields of study. Articulation agreements allowed students to acquire college credits, and work experiences allowed students to gain hours toward occupational certification.

Concerns and Barriers that School-to-Work Programs Must Address

Perhaps the most severe barrier that school-to-work programs face as they proliferate is generating enough employer interest to accommodate all students. From the perspective of the employer, substantial costs are involved in being a worksite for students. These costs include time spent in meetings with educational partners to identify desired outcomes and to coordinate learning activities, costs accrued and time spent in preparing workplaces for students (e.g., insurance, reviewing and revising organizational policies and procedures, training

employees, and managing student time and effort), and lost productivity of co-workers and supervisory personnel who participate in student training.

Most economists who have reviewed these programs sense that the benefits in the form of student productivity and potential reduced hiring costs do not offset the program costs. Program administrators and policy makers need to work on creative means of expanding work-based learning opportunities. School-based enterprises may be a potential solution. Funding the development and dissemination of "best practice" models that employers can easily emulate may be helpful. In limited situations, subsidies or tax credits may be necessary to engender employer support.

A second barrier to moving up to scale is the involvement and change required of postsecondary education. Most proponents of school-to-work programs realize that students need to pursue postsecondary training, and they are endeavoring to include postsecondary institutions in local programs. Such collaboration adds more partners to

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programs and increases accordingly the collaboration costs and hassles. However, there are reasons to bear the costs of including postsecondary institutions other than for the technical training that they may provide. Many parents perceive that school-to-work programs de-emphasize college attendance, and therefore they discourage their children from participating in them. (Some programs are changing their names to School-to-Career to overcome this perception.)

Articulated programs that allow secondary students to earn college credits and active participation in local programs by postsecondary institutions should ameliorate parental concerns.

Another problem related to postsecondary education has been the inertia that four-year colleges and universities have displayed in failing to

Finally, it is critical that program administrators and policy makers invest program resources into ongoing data collection and evaluation. The scaling up of school-to-work initiatives is based on perceived successes of demonstration programs.

recognize the rigorous content of many school-to-work programs in their application and entrance procedures. The attitude that many of these institutions exhibit is that school-to-work programs are traditional vocational education and should not be counted toward required course work for admission. This is an area where state legislators could have a positive impact by using their leverage over state institutions to get them to adopt more enlightened treatments of school-to-work programs in their admissions processes.

Another issue that programs must face as they move to scale is provision of support mechanisms for students. Developing substantive programs that have rigor and relevance is paramount. But students also have transportation, vocational guidance, counseling, and worker protection needs to which districts must attend. These types of supports may be especially necessary for at-risk students.

Finally, it is critical that program administrators and policy makers invest

program resources into ongoing data collection and evaluation. The scaling up of school-to-work initiatives is based on *perceived successes* of demonstration programs. Very little rigorous evaluation has been conducted. (An exception is a recently published net impact analysis of the Manufacturing Technology Partnership program in Genesee County, Michigan, conducted by Upjohn Institute staff. See Hollenbeck 1996a.) Without rigorous program evaluation based on valid measurement of outcomes and program interventions, educators and policy makers will never know whether school-to-work programs achieve their important objectives of improving the process of transition into the labor force for young people or achieving systemic reform of education.

Kevin Hollenbeck is a senior economist at the Upjohn Institute.

Suggested Readings

Hollenbeck, Kevin. 1996a. "An Evaluation of the Manufacturing Technology Partnership (MTP) Program." Upjohn Institute Technical Report #96-007.

Hollenbeck, Kevin. 1996b. "In their Own Words: Student Perspective on School-to-Work Programs." (Washington, DC: National Institute for Work and Learning).

Hollenbeck, Kevin, and Bridget Timmeney. 1996. "School-to-Work Transition Programs." In *School Social Work Practice and Perspectives*, 3rd Edition, edited by Constable, Flynn, and McDonald. Chicago: Lyceum Books.

Kopp, Hilary, and Richard Kazis, with Andrew Churchill. 1995. "Promising Practices: A Study of Ten School-to-Career Programs." (Boston: Jobs for the Future).

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Timothy J. Bartik

Performance Standards and Welfare Reform

A well-designed performance standard system for welfare-to-work programs has the potential to significantly increase the employment of a portion of the welfare caseload. Performance standards will not “end welfare as we know it,” eliminate teenage motherhood, or bring all welfare recipients out of poverty. But performance standards could help restore public confidence in the goals and effectiveness of our welfare system.

What Are Performance Standards?

In welfare programs, a performance standard system provides rewards and penalties for different agencies and employees in the welfare system depending on how well they achieve defined goals. Usually these goals are greater employment and earnings for welfare recipients. The primary purpose of establishing these goals, rewards, and penalties is to motivate agencies and welfare system employees to more vigorously and efficiently pursue the goals of increased earnings and employment of welfare recipients.

Performance standard systems can be distinguished by which part of the welfare system's performance is being measured and by whom. Performance standards can be used by federal officials to measure state performance, by state officials to monitor local welfare offices' performance, by local offices to monitor contractors, and by local offices or contractors to monitor individual staff.

Two of the most successful welfare-to-work programs, ET (Employment and Training) Choices in Massachusetts during the 1980s and GAIN in Riverside County, California during the 1980s and

1990s, both aggressively used performance standards. ET Choices motivated local welfare offices in Massachusetts by setting monthly job placement goals and by firing or demoting local office directors for poor performance (Behn 1991). In Riverside County, case managers, supervisory units, and district offices all have job placement goals. Meeting the goals is an important part of the job performance evaluation of individual staff (Riccio, Friedlander and Freedman 1994).

Riverside County's orientation toward employment is still unusual for the welfare system. Local welfare offices have been slow to move away from their traditional focus on reducing errors in making welfare payments and toward a focus on linking recipients with jobs. The slowness of change is partly due to the lack of federal performance standards for employment outcomes in the JOBS program—the welfare-to-work program created by the Family Support Act of 1988.

The reluctance of the federal government to adopt employment-oriented performance standards reflects a concern that such standards could distort the welfare system's operations. One concern is that standards for employment and earnings outcomes could lead to “creaming,” in which welfare-to-work programs only help recipients who are most likely to succeed without help. A second concern is that performance measures might be so poorly correlated with the true “value added” of a particular welfare office or employee that the performance standards would be perceived as unfair, and would therefore

lower employee morale. These concerns must be addressed if any performance standards system is to do more good than harm.

Guidelines for Performance Standards

Previous experience with performance standards in welfare-to-work programs and other social programs suggests the following guidelines for an effective standard system (Bartik, 1995):

1. Performance standards should focus on only a few key performance standards. This helps give firmer direction to the welfare system, avoiding conflicting goals.

2. To ensure that standards are perceived as fair, they should be adjusted for local economic conditions and the local client mix, and in particular for the prior earnings and welfare history of clients. Previous research suggests that with a few adjustments to the performance standards, there is likely to be a significant positive correlation between the performance measure and the true “value added” of the welfare-to-work program.

3. Performance measures should be based on the success of some objectively identifiable group of disadvantaged individuals. Welfare agencies and employees should not be able to select “who counts” in meeting the standards. The entire welfare caseload, or some objectively identifiable portion of the caseload, could be used in defining performance standards if there are safeguards to ensure that welfare eligibility criteria cannot be manipulated to increase the performance measure. For example, performance measures should be adjusted so that welfare agencies are unable to increase their performance by throwing individuals who are not working off the welfare rolls.

4. Whether some agency or staff member meets the performance standards should have some real but modest consequences. The consequences should be modest to avoid overstressing standards that inevitably will be imperfect.

5. Wherever possible, data needed for calculating the performance measures

should be obtained from administrative sources such as welfare department records or unemployment insurance earnings files. Use of administrative data will hold down data collection costs and increase data accuracy.

6. In medium size or larger cities, local welfare offices can monitor the performance of welfare-to-work contractors by randomly assigning welfare recipients among contractors. The relative performance of the contractors may be used to decide the amount of

Republicans' welfare reform bill, which would have eliminated the individual entitlement to welfare assistance and turned welfare over to the states as a block grant. The outlook for welfare reform during 1996 and 1997 is uncertain. Three scenarios seem possible: (1) no welfare reform bill is enacted; (2) a "block grant" welfare reform bill is enacted that allows for a considerable federal role in setting performance standards; (3) a "block grant" welfare reform bill is enacted, but without allowing much federal oversight.

If no welfare reform bill is enacted, a window of opportunity is opened up again to "improve welfare as we know it" rather than end it. The federal government could set employment- and earnings-oriented performance standards for states, and encourage states to do the same for local welfare offices. Some versions of a welfare reform block grant also allow for a federal role in setting performance standards.

On the other hand, if a block grant welfare reform eliminates federal oversight of state welfare programs, then states must take the lead in setting performance standards for local welfare offices, contractors, and employees. The concern is whether most states, absent federal oversight, will focus resources on the difficult task of increasing the employment and earnings of welfare recipients. Under a block grant, the marginal dollar of welfare expenditure is totally paid for by the state, with no federal match. In addition, states will have more freedom to reduce their own welfare spending and divert funds to other purposes. State welfare spending is politically unpopular, serves a narrow segment of the population, and does not advance a state's economic development. States will be tempted to reduce their commitment to welfare programs, and use those resources for activities with a greater payoff for more state residents: education, general tax relief, and economic development programs. The easiest and cheapest way to reduce state welfare spending is not to improve welfare-to-work efforts, but to reduce

benefit levels and restrict welfare eligibility.

Therefore, if we want better performance of the welfare system in increasing the employment and earnings of welfare recipients, it is essential to maintain a strong federal role in the welfare system. A well-designed performance standards system, focused on earnings and employment of welfare recipients, could allow both a strong federal role and great state and local flexibility. State and local governments would have the flexibility to choose the best methods, given local circumstances, to increase the earnings and employment of welfare recipients. The federal government would set performance standards, monitor performance, administer rewards or sanctions, and fund evaluations of innovative approaches to welfare reform. This continued strong federal role is consistent with the traditional wisdom in public finance that income redistribution should be the responsibility of the federal government, as the mobility of businesses and upper-income households makes this task too difficult for state and local governments.

Timothy J. Bartik is a senior economist at the Upjohn Institute.

The reluctance of the federal government to adopt employment-oriented performance standards reflects a concern that such standards could distort the welfare system's operations.

payment to contractors and how many future welfare recipients will be assigned to a contractor. In Kalamazoo, a county of less than a quarter million people, the Upjohn Institute is currently using random assignment among three different providers for the initial job search and job development phase of Michigan's Work First program for welfare recipients.

A well-designed performance standard system is no substitute for experimental studies, using random assignment, of what programs will best contribute to the long-term success of welfare recipients. Although many welfare-to-work programs have shown short-run success in getting welfare recipients back to work quicker, few programs have shown long-term success (Friedlander and Burtless, 1994).

Federal Welfare Reform

What role can performance standards play in the current stalemate over welfare reform? In January of 1996, President Clinton vetoed the congressional

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Bartik, Timothy J. 1995. "Using Performance Indicators to Improve the Effectiveness of Welfare-to-Work Programs." Upjohn Institute Working Paper No. 95-36, June.

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New Books from the Upjohn Institute

Workdays Workhours and Work Schedules

**Evidence for the United States
and Germany**

Daniel S. Hamermesh
University of Texas at Austin

Daniel S. Hamermesh presents the first comprehensive evidence explaining how days of work, hours of work, and daily schedules are determined in the U.S. and Germany. Using an *instantaneous* approach to looking at unique data sets for each country, Hamermesh provides comparative analyses on factors influencing both employees' and employers' preferred work schedules.

This technique allows him to offer a new "snapshot" perspective on work scheduling that clarifies the role of fixed costs of getting to work and of adding workdays to

plants' schedules. It also enhances our understanding of the relation between worktime and the determination of employment and presents findings with important implications for several current hot-button workplace issues, including:

- Childcare
- Demographic and socioeconomic status
- Government incentives to create jobs

"Hamermesh uses new data sources to explore some relationships that have received scant attention in the literature. He reports many interesting findings that should be made available to the profession. This is a significant contribution to labor economics."

Professor John Owen, Wayne State University

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Disability, Work and Cash Benefits

Jerry L. Mashaw
Yale University

Virginia P. Reno
National Academy of Social Insurance

Richard V. Burkhauser
Syracuse University

Monroe Berkowitz
Rutgers University

The thirteen papers presented in this volume offer insights into the causes of work disability and the types of interventions that might enable individuals with chronic health

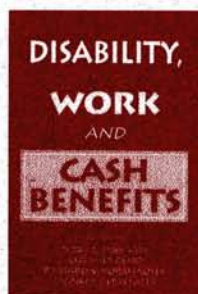
conditions or disabilities to remain at work, return to work, or enter the workforce for the first time. Following an overview, groups of papers on three topics are presented:

Work Disability and the Economic and Policy Environment - The search for ways in which labor market changes, policy interventions, and individual choices shape the workforce participation of those with disabilities.

Return to Work Policy - Analysis of return to work policies provided by both public and private sectors for persons with disabilities.

The Role of Health Care and In-Kind Benefits in Promoting Work - The particular needs of persons with disabilities that strongly affect their workforce participation.

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Exploring the Underground Economy

**Studies of Illegal and
Unreported Activity**

Susan Pozo, Editor
Western Michigan University

Tax evasion. Illegal drugs. Overseas holdings of U.S. currency. Crime. What these issues have in common is their contribution to the underground

economy, that multibillion dollar entity prospering unofficially outside the realm of the conventional economy. The six contributors to this volume examine specific aspects of the underground economy.



1. **Overseas Holdings of U.S. Currency and the Underground Economy** - Edgar L. Feige, *University of Wisconsin-Madison*.
2. **The Mismeasurement of Illegal Drug Markets** - Peter Reuter, *University of Maryland*.
3. **The Supply of Youths to Crime** - Richard B. Freeman, *Harvard University and NBER*.
4. **Explaining Tax Compliance** - James Alm, *University of Colorado at Boulder*.
5. **Beating the System?** - Ann Dryden Witte, *Florida International University and Wellesley College*.
6. **The Informal Economy: Perspectives from Latin America** - Alejandro Portes, *Johns Hopkins University*.

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